



Canadian Stroke Network

Réseau canadien contre
les accidents cérébrovasculaires

News Release: June 11, 2008

Dietary sodium contributes to 17,000 cases a year of stroke and heart disease in Canada, study says

OTTAWA: As many as 17,000 fewer Canadians would have a stroke, heart attack or suffer from heart failure every year if they consumed the recommended optimal daily level of dietary sodium, according to a study published today in the *Canadian Journal of Cardiology*.

The study, produced by researchers at the Libin Cardiovascular Institute, University of Calgary and Simon Fraser University, concludes that “reducing dietary sodium could dramatically improve the health of Canadians,” says co-author Dr. Norm Campbell of the Canadian Stroke Network.

By reducing dietary sodium in Canada from current consumption levels of about 3,500 mg a day to the adequate intake range for adults of 1,200-1,500 mg a day:

- Between 8,300 and 17,000 fewer people would suffer from strokes, heart failure and heart attacks each year depending on how effective the reduction in dietary sodium is;
- major strokes would be reduced by 10-20%;
- heart failures would decline by 10-25%; and,
- heart attacks would decrease by 3-7%.

“This further supports the urgent need to reduce the sodium in our food supply,” says Kevin Willis of the Canadian Stroke Network. “Stroke and heart disease are leading causes of death and disability in Canada. Reducing sodium consumption is a relatively easy and practical way to have a huge impact on these devastating diseases.”

Previous research from this group shows similar reductions in sodium could eliminate 30 per cent of hypertension among Canadian adults and save the health-care system \$430-\$540 million a year just in reduced hypertension treatment costs.

“It is critical that government and the food industry effectively collaborate to reduce the amount of sodium that is added to food during processing,” says Dr. Campbell of the University of Calgary, who also leads Blood Pressure Canada.

According to the most recent available data from 2002, stroke and heart disease accounted for 74,530 Canadian deaths. Hypertension, which affects about five million Canadians, is the leading risk factor for stroke and heart disease.

“Also to consider is the aging of the population, coupled with poor dietary habits, sedentary behaviour and increasing obesity rates, which suggests that prevalence of hypertension may increase substantially unless preventative measures are taken,” says study co-author Michel Joffres of Simon Fraser University.

Last October, 17 national health groups, including the Canadian Stroke Network and Heart and Stroke Foundation, called for reductions in sodium in the food supply and released a National Sodium Policy statement. Health Canada appointed a Sodium Working Group, made up of health experts, researchers, the food industry and health charity, to study the need to reduce sodium in the food supply and to make recommendations. Its work is ongoing.

Today’s *Canadian Journal of Cardiology* study reiterates that “a government priority should be to develop policies and, if required, regulations on sodium additives to food by the food manufacturing and retail industry.”

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About the Canadian Stroke Network (www.canadianstrokenetwork.ca)

The Canadian Stroke Network includes more than 100 of Canada’s leading scientists and clinicians from 24 universities who work collaboratively on various aspects of stroke. The Network, which is headquartered at the University of Ottawa, also includes partners from industry, the non-profit sector, provincial and federal governments. The Canadian Stroke Network, one of Canada’s Networks of Centres of Excellence, is committed to reducing the physical, social and economic impact of stroke on the lives of individual Canadians and on society as a whole.

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